

ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP AND SOCIAL CAPITAL IN UNIVERSITIES THROUGH SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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Abstract:

This is an exploratory study of the ways in which top universities use social entrepreneurship in order to increase the social capital of their internal stakeholders and of the university as a whole and the role played by academic leadership and academic leaders in strengthening the foundations of this social capital. We analyze eight of the top universities ranked worldwide by THE using a qualitative framework focused on their involvement in community programs and their affiliations with external stakeholders. The article presents a literature review of the ways in which social capital has been conceptualized in higher education and of its links with academic leadership, which forms the theoretical framework of the research. The results of the research show that all eight top universities have created (in various degrees) organizational structures for the support of social entrepreneurship and that these are specifically intended for the development of the social capital of internal stakeholders. The article shows that academic leaders should focus more intently on developing social entrepreneurship initiatives as these are the path towards achieving the third mission of universities and of ensuring that internal stakeholders increase their social capital and thus are able to achieve their maximum potential.

Keywords: social capital, academic leadership, university engagement, social entrepreneurship, higher education

1. Introduction

The term “social capital” has reached a high level of importance, as it has been demonstrated that enhancing the social capital leads to highest levels of achievements inside any type of organization. Ansari (2013) explains the definition of social capital as being a social resource, encapsulated in social networks, formed on confidence and common norms of cooperation, whereas Cohen and Prusak (2001) describe social capital as a set of human relations based on faith, personal interconnections and a sense of community. Field (2003) specifies that social capital is a useful way of conceptualizing the impalpable resources of community, common values and confidence upon which we draw in daily life. This actually develops the

idea that social capital should be perceived as an extremely important resource inside an organization. Individual career success, employee recruitment and retention, team effectiveness, product innovation and entrepreneurship, have been shown to be positively impacted by the existence of social capital (Adler and Kwon, 2002).

Considering that social capital can be described in one short sentence as the sum of people's behavior, intellectual capabilities, culture and connections between them, we can easily summarize that everything related to social capital is related to people. Knowledge has become an increasingly critical element of organizational capability, but knowledge outside of human relations is not easily transformable into efficient action and, therefore, social capital should be granted at least the same value. Starting from the above statements, the shift of social capital from organizational environment to university environment is completely natural, as the academic environment can be easily considered as being the most important social capital generator.

Coleman (1988) launched an examination of social capital in order to understand how it runs and how could it be used to improve cultural influences. He examined the concept of social capital based on the retention of secondary school students and concluded that it was a significant factor in student retention. One of the ideas drawn from this is that not acknowledging the importance of social and cultural capital for the people who receive access to tertiary education (the ones that would not traditionally undertake tertiary education) increases their propensity to fail (Budgen et al., 2014).

Coleman (1990, cited in Plagens, G., 2011) views social capital as analogous to physical and human capital. Physical capital makes changes in materials in order to facilitate production and human capital is created by giving people the necessary skills to be able to act in new ways. When personal interconnections change in ways to promote action, then social capital takes shape.

The academic environment is considered to shape people's behavior, to improve human inter-relations and to develop communication between people. One of the biggest contributions towards achieving these intangible assets can be brought by great academic leadership. If academic leaders can shift their viewpoint of leadership from a characteristic residing in an individual to a phenomenon that is a property of the whole system, and if they can create opportunities for connection, then leadership capacity and therefore social capital will be enhanced (Roberts, 2013). Considering that leading ideas and the formation of new academic directions represent the manifestation of the most basic form of academic leadership, which is "intellectual leadership", most academics aspire to this.

There are at least two types of academic leadership. The power of personal example is higher in academic environment, as it represents a mixture of strictness, dedication, insight and openness and its effects are powerful and lasting. This represents a form of exemplary leadership which is not directly based on the enhancement of social capital or on the mentoring of others, but this type of leadership is being replaced by other forms of academic leadership (Eddy and VanDerLinden, 2006).

In the higher education environment, a newer form of academic leadership is resource leadership, meaning the capability to manage perfectly well all the resources inside a university, but also outside the university, including the social connections. Widening the horizon, there is a strong link between the academic

environment and the business environment. A leader inside a university that promotes and encourages collaboration between internal and external society will have greater incentive to struggle for a better absorption of funds for research facilities, studentships and infrastructure, boundary spanning actions that rely on and foster social capital creation currently associated by those in academia with effective leadership (Bolden et al., 2012).

The present article first discusses the way in which social capital has been conceptualized by previous scholars who have researched the topic in connection with the higher education system and explains the relation between social capital and academic leadership, or, more exactly, how modern academic leadership depends on the fostering of the social capital of all the internal stakeholders of the university. As a result, the article stresses the fact that an understudied topic in the literature is the way in which academic leaders can use social entrepreneurship initiatives in order to increase the social capital of their organization and of their students, which is the main objective of the present research. Then, the article presents the qualitative research methodology employed in order to analyze the social entrepreneurship initiatives at top universities and the research results based on data available on the institutions' websites and concludes by showing how the findings shed new light on the academic activities related to social entrepreneurship on which university leaders should focus in order to enhance the social capital of the students and the faculty members.

2. Social capital characterization inside universities

In order to convert social capital into a more tangible element and actually extend it, there should be identified some measurement indicators. It is clear that social capital exists inside friendship relations, neighborhoods, communal or national associations and so on. But how can we measure social capital in universities?

Everything involving human interaction supports social capital creation, but the real question is does it build a meaningful amount of social capital? A very important aspect is that students entering university are coming with different backgrounds and we can say that their educational experience and academic readiness can be considered as being related to social capital. In this case, we can easily conclude that social capital is a considerable factor in student retention (Budgen et al., 2014) and that it also helps students with their professional identity development (Jensen and Jetten, 2015).

Besides this "heritage" composed by student self-discipline, determination and force of character, are there any other elements that could enhance social capital creation inside a university? Or is there any particular behavior coming from university leaders that could lead students to a direction in which they would find their own way to contribute to fostering social capital inside their university? Once academic leaders acknowledge the impact of their actions on the health of the entire university community, the most difficult part is done.

To answer the above questions, there were defined some activities that could really lead us to a concrete measurement of social capital inside a university. Elements like social participation, social engagement and commitment, social connections, trust, cooperation and social cohesion could represent the best indicators of social capital inside a university (Acquaah et al., 2014).

Cicognani et al. (2007) concluded that social participation influences in a positive way students' social well-being and that it is actually related to the sense of community and society assimilation. Regarding social engagement, for decades researchers have been pointing out that it is a crucial in improving student retention (Crosling et al., 2009). Also, studies have shown that engaging into intellectual growth experiences contributes to student success. Concerning social networks and social interaction, students and faculty members need to cultivate effective social interaction skills in order to utilize their knowledge at maximum capacity and accomplish their goals, i.e. gain effective entrance on the labor market (Fengqiao and Dan, 2015) and find avenues for research collaborations and academic entrepreneurship (Goethner et al., 2011), respectively. Thus, building on the model proposed by Baudassé (2013) we posit that social capital creation in the higher education system is based on the following activities and structures:

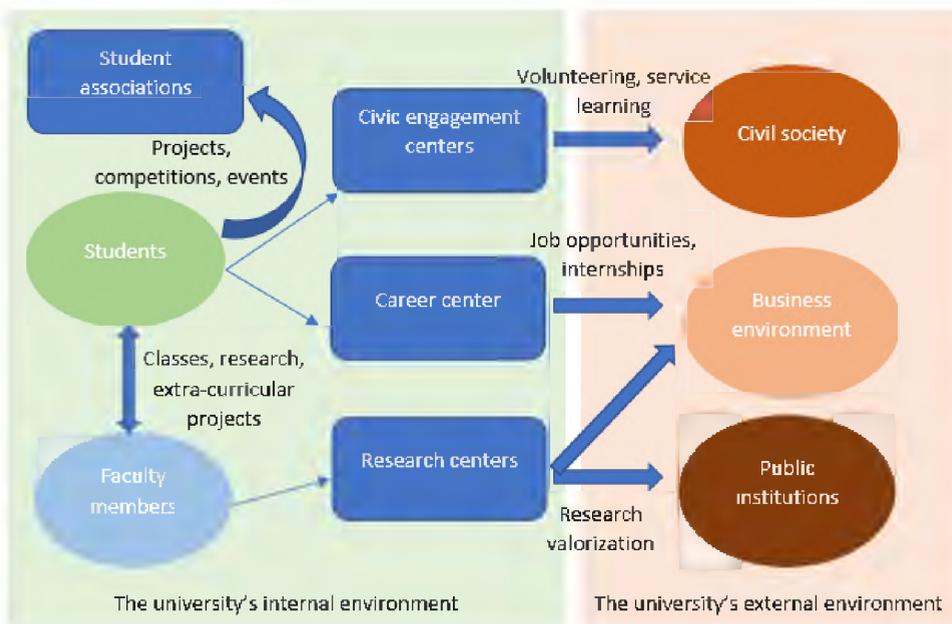


Figure 1. Creation of social capital in higher education institutions

Source: Author's own adaptation based on Baudassé (2013).

As there are researchers who have already focused on the way in which universities help build communities of students through their support of an active student life, including financing and encouraging student associations (Miracle, 2013), on the way in which career centers and other university events help students enter the job market (Greenbank, 2009), and on the way in which research centers and IP offices help faculty members valorize their research (Chakrabarti and Santoro, 2004), the present research will focus on an understudied area: the way in which universities engage in social entrepreneurship (i.e. all activities motivated by a social goal, including service learning, volunteering, incubators for social

enterprises etc.) in order to help build up their students' and faculty members' social capital and on the role of academic leadership in this process.

Previous research has shown that service learning helps students build social capital in the local communities and that this level of community involvement encourages student retention (D'Agostino, 2006), that building strong connections with their peers and faculty members helps students transition smoothly from high school to college in their first year and improves their chances to graduate (Upcraft et al., 2005), and that social engagement fostered by civic engagement is highly important for international and minority students as it helps them integrate (Kuh and Love, 2004). Thus, based on the findings of previous researchers it is clear that academic leadership should focus on fostering social entrepreneurship activities inside their universities as a means of increasing the students' social capital.

3. The link between academic leadership and social capital

All universities benefit from a strong social capital because this allows them to facilitate and rush the movement of information and resources in order to achieve their organizational goals. In this process, academic leaders play an important role because they have the ability to influence others, to act as boundary spanners and to ease the flow of information between the internal and external environments of the higher education institution, which means that they rely on the existent social capital and also work towards enhancing it (Spendlove, 2007).

While social capital in university can be increased by academic social involvement and commitment, a much higher impact can be brought by academic leaders' involvement in social interactions and social participation (Cicognani et al., 2007). In all the academic environments, a very important role is played by the leaders of the respective community in promoting and fostering social cohesion, trust and reciprocity, aspects which have been overlooked by traditional theories of leadership (Van De Valk, 2008). Whenever there is a model to follow, the path towards the indicated behavior is much easier to be followed, and it is now considered the academic leader's responsibility to ensure that the organizational culture is aligned with the values and behaviors necessary for building a strong community reliant on both bridging (between socially heterogeneous groups such as between students and faculty members, between students and potential employers etc.) and bonding (between homogenous groups like groups of students, academic departments etc.) capital (Kasemsap, 2014).

Universities are, more than any other institutions, the ones that have the power to shape or correct, if the case, youth's behavior. It is true that students enroll to a university with a well-defined set of qualities and baggage of knowledge and part of these are not easy to be shaped, but leaders from academia still have a special influential power because they have a direct influence on faculty recruitment, development and retention and also on the organizational culture (Mulford, 2003).

While some universities focus more on the "technicalities" of life, still the trend is to adapt the technical content and also the practical side to a more human approach. In few words, people started to express more and more often the need to work on the soft skills rather than on other cognitive capabilities (Spirovska Tevdovska, 2015). The reason is that human inter-relations managed in time to gain importance in every industry and domain and this is why higher education is currently regarded as an environment in which students build their social capital in order to

ensure that they have better chances of achieving their potential once they graduate (Tonkaboni et al., 2013).

While the link between academic leadership and social capital cannot be clearly drawn yet, still there is a lot of improvement on this side, especially because almost all of the social initiatives inside a university are launched by its leaders (Kasemsap, 2014). Also, although there is a primary focus on human capital capabilities, social capital skills have begun to receive more attention as components of a leader's skill set (McCallum and O'Connell, 2009).

There is enough evidence of the fact that there is a strong relationship between social capital and leadership, but the understanding of the relationship between academic leadership and social capital is still insufficient. We can state, though, that academic leadership development more correctly refers to programs designed to improve the collective leadership ability of a group or community inside the university (Van De Valk, 2008).

A good example of academic leadership is considered to be that of program leaders, who hold a pivotal role in universities in ensuring that their initiatives and ideas are translated into actions (Brown, 2011). When senior managers work closely with program leaders, this powerful partnership can bring a real change in the university. Presently, most changes have to do with the third mission of the universities and the extension of their connections with their external environment, which can be done either in order to valorize the research results of faculty members (academic entrepreneurship) or, more broadly, in order to contribute to the social and economic development of the local, regional and national communities (social entrepreneurship) (Păunescu et al., 2013). Thus, the attention of academic leaders is now currently focused also on fostering social entrepreneurship inside their universities as a means to increase their standing and of ensuring that the interests of all internal and external stakeholders are protected and respected (Ashoka, 2013).

4. Research methodology

The higher education system generated a lot of changes in social, economic and political fields over the time. Universities are social systems perceived as centers of knowledge and information, therefore social capital is necessary to guarantee organizational survival and universities' competitive advantage in the complex and competitive world (Nazem et al., 2014). Empirical studies highlighted that social capital positively influences product innovation, knowledge search and inter-unit feedback-seeking (Bai et al., 2013). Social activities have an eminent role in the knowledge-based economy (Lesser and Cothrel, 2001).

Social capital receives a high level of importance in estimating the wealth of the organization, therefore it is mandatory to manage to determine the level of social capital inside any organization. Considering current studies and research results in the area, the notion of social capital seems to have been given three components: cognitive dimension, structural dimension and relation dimension (Kasemsamp, 2014). The cognitive dimension refers to attributes like: stories, shared language, customs and traditions. The structural dimension focuses on establishing roles, social networks and other social structures together with rules and procedures, while the relation dimension includes motivational elements. Several studies in the area lead to the conclusion that the structural dimension has the highest level of contribution to the creation and expansion of social capital in universities (Tonkaboni et al., 2013).

Our research delivers supplementary elements to assess the structural dimension of social capital, considering involvement in community actions as the main focus of the analysis. The main motivation of the present study is that there is a lack of understanding of the way in which social entrepreneurship activities inside universities lead to the creation of social capital, therefore the objective is to contribute to the research efforts that have been done in this direction and help with identification of the variety of social entrepreneurship activities in which top universities are involved and with the analysis of the ways in which these activities foster social capital creation.

Thus, the present research will focus on answering the following research questions:

RQ1: What type of organizational structures have been set up in order to foster social entrepreneurship at top higher education universities?

RQ2: What type of activities are these structures fostering?

RQ3: What is the role of academic leadership in fostering social capital creation through these structures and activities?

The analysis was conducted for the top 8 universities ranked by The Higher Education for the year 2016 (www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2016) with the purpose to analyze the extent to which these universities are getting involved in community actions. The data for the analysis was gathered from the institutional charters and available online resources. Information was extracted using the following criteria: a) community involvement (number of social projects the university is involved in), and b) social affiliations. The complete list of universities, the sources for information and the organizational structures that were included in the present study is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Top 8 THE Universities and their social initiatives

University	Community involvement and Social Affiliations
California Institute of Technology	Caltech Y - raises social, ethical and cultural awareness through teamwork (www.caltechy.org)
University of Oxford	Skoll Centre - the leading global entity for the advancement of social entrepreneurship (skoll.org)
Stanford University	Stanford Social Innovation Programs - focuses on developing leaders who can solve the world's most pressing problems (www.gsb.stanford.edu/faculty-research/centers-initiatives/csi) The Program on SE (cddl.fsi.stanford.edu/docs/program-social-entrepreneurship) The Haas Center (haas.stanford.edu)
University of Cambridge	ISES -partnership between TATA and four leading universities (managed by London School of Economics) (www.lse.ac.uk/intranet/CareersAndVacancies/careers/Service/Internships/TataISES/Home.aspx)

Massachusetts Institute of Technology	MIT Public Service Center (studentlife.mit.edu/pkgcenter) CoLab (colab.mit.edu)
Harvard University	Public Service Initiative (hls.harvard.edu/dept/sfs/public-service-initiative) SEI at HBS (www.hbs.edu/socialenterprise/Pages/default.aspx) The Social Enterprise Club (www.hbs.edu/mba/student-life/activities-government-and-clubs/Pages/club-details.aspx?name=socialenterprise) The Harvard College Social Innovation Collaborative (www.harvardsic.org)
Princeton University	Breakout Princeton (pace.princeton.edu/get-involved/breakout-princeton) Princeton Social Entrepreneurship Initiative (PSEI) (pseipresidents.wixsite.com/pseil/programs)
University of Chicago	The Rustandy Center for Social Sector Innovation (research.chicagobooth.edu/sei) The Polsky Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation (polsky.uchicago.edu)

Source: Author's own research based on information available on the websites mentioned in the table.

An important component of this research is the analysis and understanding of the level that the world's great academic institutions have reached as respects the social component. After collecting the public information available on each university's website, a comparative analysis based on the following 2 dimensions: community involvement and number of social programs with university association helped us to better understand the way in which these universities use social entrepreneurship in order to foster social capital creation.

5. Research results

It is not difficult to observe the high level of involvement of the above-mentioned universities in the social domain. The launch of social initiatives, social projects and social research centers started many years ago, as these universities can be easily called pioneers in this field. The institutions, networks, collaborations and partnerships created for social involvement are just evolving, multiplying and adapting to the continuous and rapid world change.

In terms of research institutions dedicated to social innovation, we can conclude that Harvard University has the largest number of research centers and institutions among the list of the analyzed universities (four independent initiatives). The Harvard Business School Social Enterprise Initiative applies innovative business practices to drive social change, engaging with the nonprofit, for-profit and public sectors to generate and share resources. Also, the university offers programs designed to support students who are professionally engaged in the social sector. Research forums and conferences sponsored by the Social Enterprise Initiative have

addressed many topics including: nonprofit strategy, business leadership in the social sector, consumer driven healthcare, global poverty and public education.

A lot of accent is put into creating the desire to serve community's most pressing problems amongst students into all the above-mentioned universities. But the most important thing is that students are given all the necessary knowledge, resources and support needed to become aware of the importance that this field should receive. All the information is pushed in front of them so that they only have to come with the appropriate idea/solution. They will receive consulting, they will be properly directed and they will possess the necessary resources in order to develop their own social enterprise, which include not only financial capital, but bridging social capital (i.e., links with potential investors, business partners etc.).

Each of the above-mentioned universities created a hub for advancing social entrepreneurship. This is the place for transferring knowledge, for collaboration between potential social entrepreneurs, a place for exposing ideas and opinions. Probably this is the most useful tool for the students. Social entrepreneurship is the most valuable contributor to fostering social capital inside a university. Considering the three components of social capital (cognitive, structural and relational), social entrepreneurship finds its place inside the structural dimension in our case where it is represented by social projects and social affiliations of universities.

If we take a closer look, in terms of involvement in social projects, Massachusetts Institute of Technology would seem weak from this perspective. MIT only has the MIT Public Service Center and the Colab community. However, the center's activities are numerous and in 2016, it helped MIT students perform more than 9,000 hours of community service, it organized the IDEAS Global Challenge where 12 teams were given \$97,500 to implement their social projects and it provided opportunities for more than 60 faculty members to get involved in solving major social issues (e.g., food security, environmental protection, health etc.) in the United States and abroad. Furthermore, the Colab community is focused specifically on increasing social capital as its main mission is to link students and faculty members with external stakeholders interested in urban sustainability in order for them to be able to initiate projects and conduct research.

Moreover, the Haas Center from Stanford University has partnered with California JusticeCorps Program to solve a pressing issue faced by courts today: providing equal access to justice. JusticeCorps recruits and trains university students annually to serve in overburdened legal self-help centers throughout California. The Student Volunteers Council from Princeton University has well-established relationships with more than 40 community partners, mentoring children, restoring houses, organizing blood drives and visit the elderly.

The University of Cambridge provides us with an example of a top university that is not actively involved in social entrepreneurship activities, as it is only part of a consortium of four UK universities which have partnered with Tata in order to offer their students the possibility to become part of projects based on the development of social enterprises or CSR projects in India.

6. Conclusions

Based on the findings of our qualitative research, the link between social capital, social entrepreneurship and academic leadership appears to be very strong, as these concepts are inter-dependent in the current academic environment. All of the

universities included in the present study have taken the initiative of setting up centers for the development of social entrepreneurship either in the form of community service, incubators for social enterprises, social internships or networks of collaborators interested in various social issues.

These initiatives rely on the existence of a broad range of academic leaders at various organizational levels who are able to engage in partnerships and be described as transformational leaders, because they are capable of generating new means of social capital for the academic community. Those leaders share the traits of social entrepreneurs or community representatives.

It is argued here that good academic leadership will foster social capital and increase socially oriented behavior, in such a way that social entrepreneurship will start to take shape, but it is also argued that not all top university leaders have given their attention to these matters, as it was shown in the case of the University of Cambridge. High social capital is associated with a mixture of qualities/traits like: cooperativity, solidarity, trust, acknowledgement, protection. All of these traits can be easily shaped if there exists ability and competence from the person entitled to train the respective people.

The general message that this paper brings is that university experience can be much more valuable if there is a focus on increasing the social capital inside the university. An increase in social capital will boost university's success in giving birth to greater human inter-connectedness. Academic leadership is the most important factor in the equation, as academic leaders have the greatest responsibility on the university's final outcome in terms of socially responsible behavior and social capital expansion. Considering a university with high social capital, there are a lot of means to utilize this powerful resource. This means that it is most valuable asset, which is human capital, is more than prepared to transfer this behavior to the external environment and this will actually lead to a great and more than needed change in the society.

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